DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 091 293 SO 007 491

TITLE	Citizen Action in Education, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1974.
INSTITUTION	Institute for Responsive Education, New Haven, Conn.
PUB DATE	74
NOTE	12p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute for Responsive Education, Yale University, 70 Sachem St., New Haven, Connecticut 06520 (Free)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizen Participation; Citizen Role; Civil Liberties; *Community Involvement; Decentralization; Educational Change; Family School Relationship; Labor Unions; Models; Newsletters; *Parent Participation; Parent Responsibility; Parent School Relationship; *Public Schools; Resource Materials; *School Community Cooperation; Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

The first issue of the newsletter for the Institute for Responsive Education disseminates information to help in identifying people, places, projects, and new ideas in participatory education. The lead article discusses the purposes and role of the institute as studying and assisting citizen participation in the decision-making process of local schools and communities, while not advocating any particular reform or single approach to organizing, administering, or teaching. News items present brief notes on other groups in the United States who are contributing to this goal. Two major articles describe a model, called Public Schools of Choice, developed by Mario Fantini, and discuss the relationship of unions and teachers' rights. A book report concludes the issue by reviewing a parent's experience in fighting for improved school services in New York City. There is no cost for the newsletter; correspondence, inquiries, and information are invited. (KSM)

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CITIZEN ACTION IN EDUCATION

Institute for Responsive Education/Volume one, number one/Winter, 1974

Searching for a 'Third Force': Can We Put the Public Back into Public Education?

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
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The grumblings are loud and clear in the swirling world of public education: school systems have become overly centralized and bureaucratic, excessively professionalized, and unresponsive to the changing social needs. Many people seem to sense that they are paying too much and getting too little. Diagnosis of what is wrong and prescriptions for treatment vary widely, but there is widespread agreement that profound reforms are needed in how and what children learn, as well as how schools are organized, governed, and financed. But reform is coming slowly despite a decade of foundation and federal support of innovation and an avalanche of studies, task forces, reports, books, and master plans. School boards and the central administrative staffs and teachers organizations too often seem to be a force against change rather than for it. Many teachers and administrators feel trapped in a change-resistant system. And the parents and citizens...

...yes, there lies the main hope for educational change—in the citizens, parents, students, employers emerging as a "third force" to overcome the inertia of school bureaucracies and teacher organizations, much in the same way they occasionally have overcome other problems by becoming more active, more vocal, more informed, and more demonstrative on community and national issues. It is in support of this notion that the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) was created this fall by Don Davies, a Fellow in Social Science in Yale University's Center for the Study of Education. The major goal of the Institute is to study and assist citizen participation in the decision-making process of local schools and communities, while not advocating any *particular* reform or single approach to organizing, administering or teaching.

The Institute's work is based on the belief in participatory democracy: whether by deliberate design or unconscious drift, we have moved away from popular democracy and

must learn again what it is, or how to create it if we have never lived it at all, says Davies, the director. It is time, he says, to challenge the idea that democracy means having the best and brightest make decisions for ordinary citizens ("in their best interest," "for the national security") who cannot be trusted to know the consequences of their decisions.

Admittedly, average citizens will need help and information as they attempt to involve themselves in the complex problems of public education, and attempt to share more equitably in the decision-making process. The aim should not be unilateral, absolute power for citizens, Davies says, but rather a more equitable sharing of power among the professionals, the elected or appointed central school board, and the consumer (parents, citizens, and students). Increased power for the citizen in the governance of the schools will help to create more effective, responsive educational institutions.

The non-profit Institute, then, will be organized with a grass roots orientation, according to Davies. Formerly the Deputy Commissioner of the U.S. Office of Education, Davies left his government post partly because he became disenchanted with the efforts of his office to impose innovation from the top—"band-aid effects" rather than fundamental changes which require community participation.

During the next five years, the IRE (which is funded in part by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the Norman and Karen Stone Foundation) plans to fulfill a number of specific goals:

—studies to identify and assess alternative models for effective citizens participation in educational decision-making;
—a program to encourage better utilization of corporate resources for school reform;
—assistance to local groups by

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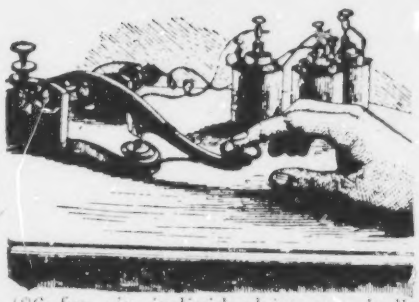
News, Views, & Breakthroughs

Washington, D.C.—Home is not only where the heart is; it's where the brain is, too. Educational research—from the Coleman Report and the Jencks study to everyday educational experience—is producing mounting evidence that the home is vital to school achievement and most important, that the parent is the child's most important teacher. Thus, the importance of parent accountability in education has become the message of the recently-organized *Home and School Institute* of Washington, D.C.

The major goals of HSI are first, to help parents learn how to build and supplement the work of the school and second, to help teachers and administrators work more effectively with the goldmine of educational experience that occurs in the home. The non-profit Institute has developed programs and publications designed to translate educational research into action, to join parents and teachers in a new educational partnership: not even the best school can do the job alone.

Last year, two programs were consolidated under the organizational structure of The Home and School Institute, Inc.: the educator in-service program called *School and Parent-Community Involvement* (begun in 1970), and the *Success for Children* parent program begun in 1965 by HSI President Dorothy Rich. This year, HSI received two teacher training grants: The Washington Technical Institute provided funds for an HSI Education for Parenthood course for DC teachers working with young parents in public schools; and The Hattie M. Strong Foundation provided funds for an HSI program to help principals and teachers in teams create their school and parent-community approach. The HSI graduate course in education, school, and parent-community is offered through Trinity College in Washington.

HSI is beginning to make its materials available nationally. *Thinking, Reading and Writing Success* is among the first of several publications putting the HSI parent program approach on paper. For school systems and educators, HSI has just begun the *HSI Newsletter*

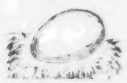


(86 for six individual issues, bulk rates on request).

For more information on HSI publications and workshops, write Dorothy Rich, The Home and School Institute, Box 4847, Washington, D.C. 20008. ■

Berkeley, Ca.—A newsletter called *Apple Pie* is providing monthly wedges of information to help people working on parent involvement in education to get in touch with each other. The newsletter is published by the *Center for the Study of Parent Involvement* (CSPI), directed by Daniel Safran.

Through the notes in *Apple Pie*, the Center would like to share the various successes and failures of citizen participation programs. A $2.00 subscription will bring you eight issues of *Apple Pie* for 1973-74; the newsletter depends upon contributions to meet its cost. For information, write: Center for the Study of Parent Involvement / 2544 Etna Street / Berkeley, Ca. 94704. ■



San Francisco—When a 1971 court order mandated elementary school busing in San Francisco, public interest in schools soared overnight. The board of education formed a Citizens' Advisory Council for Desegregation in order to set policy for the actual busing plan. From this experience, parents from various communities first realized many mutually

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The Journal
of
The Institute
for
Reponsive Education

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The Institute seeks help in identifying people, places, projects, and new ideas in participatory education—and it invites correspondence. Address inquiries and information to *Institute for Responsive Education* / Center for the Study of Education / Yale University / 70 Sachem Street / New Haven, Conn. 06520 / (203) 436-4895, 787-0881.

Schools of Choice

By Mario Fantini

I am not a guru of American education. Everything I say is based on my own experience, which is one way of looking at education and I am sure there are a dozen other ways of looking at it. Nonetheless, I also feel that you ought to know that I have been a teacher literally at every level of education: this was by my design, to make sure that I understood what the whole educational system was like. I was dying to begin with first grade and kindergarten, but they didn't allow men in those days. So I started from second grade and worked my way up through college, and I have that much of a perspective. I also worked with children who have been classified as emotionally disturbed. I have been an administrator, a school principal, an assistant superintendent, a director of special projects, and then I worked with the Ford Foundation. And, I have been a reformer: I think that there are better ways of doing things.

But what I want to tell you about has very little to do with this. How I got into my present focus was really not because of my experience as a teacher (although there are some useful flashbacks) or as an administrator, or even because of my involvement as an officer with the Ford Foundation, and with New York City school decentralization, which was a battleground. (I have scars to prove it.) My insight came as a parent: a parent trying to deal with the process and the structure of education.

When I worked at the Ford Foundation, I used to live in a suburban community in New Jersey, middle class or upper middle class if you had to give it a classification. Being somewhat sensitive to education, we were looking forward to the start of school for our little child, who was going to kindergarten. I began to talk with him about all the glory of going to school, and how wonderful it would be and all the opportunities that would be open, and how exciting it would be, and I kept building this motivation. The little fellow was excited.

I decided that when it was registration time, I personally would take him to school. Sure enough, when the day came, I took time out from work, took the little fellow in my hand, and we went to the school. As we were walking on this beautiful day, I was saying how I wished I was starting school again, and I generally was conning him as to what the excitement would be. He believed me. I was his father and he was somewhat anxious about what was going on, but I took his hand and we went in to the neighborhood school.

As soon as we walked in the door, we found a long line of other parents with their children; it was quite noisy. No sooner did we take our place in the line, then a secretary came out yelling, "Can't you keep those kids quiet?" "Can't you see how busy we are?" and everybody sh-h-hed! Instinctly, I began to squeeze the hand of my little son saying, "sh-h-h-! we don't do things like that here, you have to keep quiet." So that the children who were listening to us talk about the excitement of going to school all of a sudden were learning their very first experience, that in school you keep quiet and there are certain people who tell you to keep quiet and not only that, but the parents obey. Okay, I'm squeezing my son's hand for about an hour, keeping him quiet and going against my nature, but I finally got to the office and walked in. The secretary obviously had been working hard and taking a whole series of new students,asking each one of them his name, address, so forth, other information, date of birth. I said, "November the 16th."

"November the 16th! Our cutoff date is October 31st."

"Wait a minute," I said, "I came here to enroll my son. What does October 31st mean?"

"It means that *that* is the cutoff date."

"Well," I said, "what difference

Mario Fantini is Dean of the School of Education at the State University of New, New Paltz. The following article was adapted from a public lecture given by Dr. Fantini last fall at Yale University, sponsored by the Center for the Study of Education. Portions of the lecture will appear in a forthcoming book, Public Schools of Choice: The Reform of American Education, *to be published by Simon and Schuster.*

does 16 days make? I have been talking to him all this time and I have been with Head Start, and all the other things dealing with the importance of early learning. I want him to get started."

And she said, "That's our policy and that's it."

I was disturbed but I thought "Okay, in Russia they start their children at seven, so I will take him home and see what happens."

A few days later I got a letter: it said, "We are sorry that your son couldn't be enrolled, but there is a problem of 'readiness.'" What does this have to do with anything? I knew that there was a cutoff period and I could accept that; but they began to talk about all kinds of things that happen when children start school prematurely, and then I began to get disturbed about it. I decided to talk with the superintendent of schools, whom I knew, and in talking about it, he said, "Well, we usually don't do this, but I am going to give you permission because I know you, and because we realize that these policies sometimes are arbitrary, I am going to give you a chance to do that"—which was a mistake. Everything I am about to tell you now also reveals errors on my part, as a parent, but I am trying to be as authentic as I can to lead up to something, in day-to-day terms, that might make some sense.

The principal was very disturbed that first, I went over her head, and second, that I, as an educator did not seem to understand the importance of "readiness." I told her I understood it but I didn't think that sixteen days made much of a difference. And so my son started.

About six weeks later, I had a conference with the teacher and heard that my boy was not really doing too well and that he wasn't "ready," and it became clear that he was going to flunk kindergarten. For somebody who has gone to Harvard, that is quite a thing to take. I had never heard of anybody flunking kindergarten myself, and I went to see the principal, who reminded me that she had warned me that he wasn't ready. And I said to her, "Well, I know you made that clear, and it seems to have come out that way." It didn't occur to me at that time that there was such a thing as "expectations," and yet, I was seeing what I began to read later about the importance of expectations: they expected him to be behind and he *was*. I thought about it; I did research, and like everybody else, I found the data that coincided with my conclusions—that retaining children doesn't really help.

So I went back to the principal and said I thought I would like to have my child enter first grade—"I know you think he's not ready but I don't think it profits him to repeat because the research says so and so."

And she said, "Dr. Fantini, you're an educator and I'm surprised at you. I could expect it of a layman, but not from you. You are putting pressure on your son and using your influence to do something that really isn't right."

To a certain extent that was true. Now there was a debate going on, and I went to talk with the school psychologist, who knew me right away.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I know your son because he is now a *case* in the district."

"Well, what do you suggest?" I said.

And he said, "Well, we will have to do more study on him."

But when I asked him how I should get my son to go into first grade, he admitted that I had a point about the retention, so I decided to see the superintendent again. The superintendent said that if I really felt strongly about it (and I did) they would put him in first grade. I went back to see the principal and she said she hoped I knew what I was doing, and I said fine, at least I know that I can appeal to somebody and I'm getting justice. That's two policies that I broke.

About two or three weeks later, I found that the little fellow really hated school. I began to have second thoughts, saying to myself, you're stupid, all of your education and you can't even do anything for your own son. I was really having guilt feelings about it. Was I using him as a pawn to test my own notions about reform? I was going back and forth. Pretty soon, he was bed wetting.

I went to see the school psychologist again and he said, "Yes, we have been doing more study about your son and from our observations, your son is the type of person who would profit from a non-competitive environment." I was impressed.

"That's kind of true," I said. "I can see him at home. I have four children. I can see the way he behaves and you may be right. I have an older son who really outshines him on everything and I can understand why he doesn't want to compete. That makes a lot of sense. Can you put him in a non-competitive environment, please?"

"Oh," he said, "we don't have any."

"Wait a minute," I said. "You mean the teacher he has now obviously generates a competitive environment."

"Oh, yes," he said. "It's competitive. We have standards and the children have to compete in terms of norms and everything else".

How, then,could I get my son into a non-competitive environment?

"Well," he said, "there was a teacher, who was beginning to move in a non-competitive way."

"That's fantastic," I said. "All I have to do is to go to the school and ask the principal to move him." And I thanked him for being so consistent and good.

I went to see the principal, and by that time, when she saw me coming she said, "Oh, here comes that militant parent." I told her I had just had a talk with the school psychologist and he thought that my son would profit from the teacher down the hall who has a non-competitive environment.

"Dr. Fantini," she said, "are you still trying to find excuses? You know that all teachers are the same; each teacher is just as certified as the other one. We have a curriculum and

you keep looking and you keep trying to find excuses for your son."

And I said, "But why don't you just try it and see how it works."

"No," she said, "if you have been an administrator you know that I can't go in there and take the child out. What would the teacher think? The teacher wuld lose face and you know as an administrator I have got to support the teachers."

Well, I felt that I had cashed all my chips and I didn't know what to do about it. I had started something and I couldn't finish it. I couldn't keep going back to the superintendent of schools and have him override the principal. But at least I have some inkling that my son would profit from a non-competitive environment. So I decided to call the Rutgers School of Education and find out if they had any experts who could tell me if there were any non-competitive environments in this area. And they said indeed there was a school where the principal and the primary teachers were beginning to move in this direction. In fact, the principal had gone to England and come back with some notions from the schools there. I said, fine, where is it? They told me it was another public school about fifteen minutes from where I lived.

When I went to see the principal of that school he said, "Yes, we are moving in this new kind of ungraded informal environment and we would be happy to take your son."

I said, "Wow!"

And then he said, "Where do you live?"

And I said, "Well I live in..."

"Oh," he said, "you're a transfer case."

I knew I was a case of some kind but I didn't know what to call myself.

"Now wait a minute," I said, "I'm willing to pay tuition. I'm willing to pay twice--I will pay taxes in my own community and I will pay whatever your tuition is. Not only that, but I'll have my son come in on a taxi. He can come in and then I'll have a taxi waiting for him and it won't cost you anything and I'll do anything else that is necessary."

"I wish I could help you," he said, "but it's out of my hands. You will have to see the superintendent of schools."

All right, I knew the superintendent of schools, so I went to see him and he had one of the books that I had published—I figured, gee I'll even autograph it for him. After chatting awhile, he asked, "Now what can I do for you?"

And I said, "You know I have this special problem, I'm a transfer case, you know, can you help me?"

"Gee, I would love to help you," he said, "I wish I could help you, you know I want to help you. But if I have to do it for you, I'll have to do it for other people, and there are a lot of people who would want that; I have had other requests."

At this point, I said, "Well, if they want it why don't you give it to them? Give it to anybody who wants it."

"But," he said, "that would create all sorts of logistical and organizational problems, and you know the role of the superintendent and what he has to deal with."

And I did; and he wouldn't budge.

So here I was with a notion that my son would profit from a non-competitive environment and I found one and now I couldn't get him in there. These are *public* schools; they exist to serve the public. Yet, I couldn't move my son sixty feet to another teacher and I couldn't put him in a cab and pay all of the expenses to another school. Of course, I could buy a house, not any house, mind you, but a house in the district served by the school which had an informal primary—at a cost of between $65,000 and $70,000. I couldn't afford that.

I heard of a Montessori school, a private school, which was supposed to be non-competitive. I was told that they compete with themselves in that school, a structured environment but with minimized competition with others. Fine, I thought, I'm desperate now. It was a tremendous compromise for me because I am a public school man, but I said okay, let me try it. I went into this private, quasi parochial school, observed a couple of classes, sat down with the head master, and then she told me the tuition. It was over $3,000—it didn't cost me that much to go to college—and I couldn't afford it.

Now what could I do? Here I was, a doctorate from Harvard unable to find an environment that is suitable for my youngster after diagnosis from an expert. I began to have flashbacks. I remembered the literature I read when preparing to become a professional educator: the commitment to each child, growth and development of every learner, maximum potential of every learner.

Yet, now I had a youngster here that nobody would handle. I was forced to put him into a situation in which he bed wet, or take him out of school completely, and have him feel then that he was inferior because he was pulled out. He would ask why he was being pulled out when nobody else was and I wouldn't know how to handle it.

I went to the only voice that showed any compassion—the school psychologist.

"Look," I said, "here is my journey and this is my tale and what do I do?"

"Dr. Fantini," he said, "the problem is that you are expecting the school to adjust to your child. No school is going to turn itself around for just one child."

Just one child.

I wondered if there were any others who felt like I did. I went home, talked to my wife, and we started to make phone calls. We set up coffee klatches and invited first grade parents to talk abut their first grade program, exploring the differences between a competitive and non-competitive environments. We brought in the psychologist who began to talk about the differences and he gave us case studies of cafeteria feeding, where the children selected things that were good for them. We invited the teacher who had the non-competitive environment. She came in and said that she was much more

in the background. She had a corner that was math, another corner that was reading. The people were stunned. Nobody even told them before that there was anything like a non-competitive environment. Now, the parents were also teachers. They taught their child to walk and talk and had a natural disposition toward particular ways of teaching. A very interesting thing began to happen: there were many parents who had children in the non-competitive environment who didn't want their children in there, and there were people whose children were in the competitive environment who preferred the non-competitive.

All of this was going on in first grade classes, sixty feet apart. Two teachers, each teaching, naturally or by design, in a different manner. Some children who were assigned to one teacher by chance connected, and some didn't connect. So what we proposed was a situation in which parents selected their child's school environment by choice rather than chance: a very small change in the organization. The principal reluctantly accepted, since we had developed the proposal and taken it to the Board of Education—and there was no money involved, the teacher was still being paid.

Thus, the first grade began with a notion of options, based on style of teaching that generated a certain type of environment. That worked for some children, not all children, and it happened to work for my youngster because at the end of that experience everybody who had observed him said he has profited from that experience. I heard no words like "he's ready," "he's not ready," or "he's slow," an "underachiever," or "late bloomer" or any of those classifications. It suddenly dawned on me: I had been talking about decentralization of New York City schools, talking about community control of a major district like New York. I even had gotten involved with performance contracting, desegregation, all of those major reforms. And here was a simple thing like recognizing that teachers are different. They had different styles, and you have different styles regardless of whether you are certified or not; you close that door, just as I remember closing the door and imposing my style, not in an evil way, since that is what you are supposed to do. As I imposed my style on the group in front of me, I began to recognize that there was a large number who connected with it, and another group that did not connect with it. What did I do? I began to think that there must be something wrong with those who didn't connect. It was very natural for me to do that and I began to say "slow," "underachiever," "disturbed," of some kind, "disruptive," because they didn't connect with me. I tried to hide the fact that, in another teacher, the same children who didn't respond to me were responding to somebody else. By virtue of my personality, by virtue of the approach to learning that seemed to be most normal for me, there was simply a mismatch in styles and so the youngsters were sentenced to me and I was sentenced to them.

And we still do that today because that policy hasn't changed. I'm not talking about achievement grouping, or heterogeneous grouping. I'm talking about parents and teachers beginning to say, look you're a teacher at home and I'm a teacher in here. Tell me a little bit about how your child learns and I'll tell you whether he or she fits with me or not. There are certain teachers who can adapt and take two or three styles and there are others who can't.

It was also during that time that I began to realize that we, at the Ford Foundation, had been doing a lot of funding (and I had been party to it) of all of these programs outside of the public schools. There were alternatives to public education because public education was considered some kind of monolith, that you really couldn't do anything in there and so people who seriously wanted to bring about reform seceded from the public schools and began to set up alternatives to the public schools—and we began funding them. I remember people coming into my office, speaking the rhetoric of the 1960's: our public schools were "oppressive" and their children were "dying"; there was "death at an early age" and they were going to start an alternative school and it was going to be a free school, "nothing oppressive for us." We kept supporting them because the Ford Foundation is in the business of innovation. I would go into these so-called free schools where the kids were running around and there was graffitti on the walls and I would say what's going on here? Can I understand your objectives? They used to say that was the public school talk, we don't have any "objectives" here. I asked about all the running around. They would say that the children were acting out their hostility. Sometime later, I would go back again and see a sign on the door: "closed." These free schools didn't last too long.

I also remembered that during the old Civil Rights movement there were storefront schools that were the very beginnings of alternative ways of doing things, which lasted for a couple of weeks and then people went back to business as usual. When things got very bad (and they get bad in cities first), you began to see that people start to legitimize or start to accept the fact that you need different ways of doing things, so we funded Harlem Prep and the street academies in New York, which said that they were going to take the casualties of one system and show you that they are not only educable but they can go to college—and indeed they did. Why is it, then, that they would start these schools and they would keep coming back to Ford every year, saying we need another $1 million, another $500,000 and I would say, "Now wait a minute, we are not funding Ford Foundation schools."

It was just about this time that the incident with my son began to take place, and I began to see that

the real arena, where 85 percent of the children attended, was the public school. It was the public school that had to be reformed and you couldn't impose a plan on anybody as we had tried to do with decentralization, which looked like it favored one group and not another. Certainly, the performance contract people who wanted schools to become like business and industry, mass producing kids at each grade level, was threatening to those of us concerned with the potential of each child. At this time, some economists who began to say that parents are educational consumers who are dissatisfied with what the services they are getting. One of the things we ought to consider, then, is to give parents money equal to the cost of educating a child for a year and let them then shop around for the kind of education that makes the most sense. This is the voucher plan.

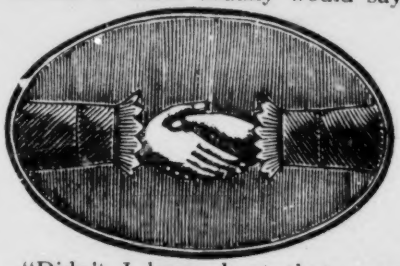
I began to see that other people felt the same kinds of frustration. Even though 60 percent of the public still preferred public schools pretty much as they were, there was this critical mass of discontented consumers who were beginning to become militant and say that they wanted a more open school or a free school or something like that, and the rest of the people said they didn't want any of that kind of stuff in here, and a tug of war took place in some communities, the majority seeming to win out but at the expense of disruption and discontentment.

So here was a notion of giving vouchers to consumers that they could cash in—and since they were unhappy with the public schools they probably would cash them in the private schools. The public school teachers and administrators opposed that, saying, what's going to happen if everybody starts leaving the public schools? Public schools are the bedrock of democracy...

Then it dawned on me that it is not only a politically dangerous strategy to try to go outside the schools, but it's really not necessary. We already have a "voucher system": it's called public education. We can simply tell teachers, identify their styles and we'd try to match them with certain types of students. And then if teams of teachers get together with the same style and say, "We'd like to develop a school within a school," we'd still have the same teachers in the same neighborhood school—and no need for wholly new alternative schools. The present approach—which works for significant numbers of students and which is an alternative in itself, always will exist. It's ridiculous to throw out the standard approach because some of us didn't like it. However, it can no longer be the only way to go—and yet, it remains the only way.

Our schools have been monolithic and by and large they have embraced this standard approach which has evolved over time. Because they are human, and because they have styles, teachers try to change and adapt somewhat when they get into the institution, but the constraints of the institution force them into a standard way of doing things. What I want to do, and what is easy to do, is to liberate the style of teaching. It will not cost a nickel; the main ingredient is giving teachers a choice of styles. The only difference is that the parents and the students also have a choice as to which style of teaching they want to be matched with. Right now we have the capability for the standard approach, and what would be considered, I guess, an informal classroom or an informal school based on the principles of "progressive education." But I don't want to use that term, because it conjures up all kinds of contradictory things. So, I don't use it any more.

The English have British infant schools in which their approach to learning is much more "informal," more integrated than the approach we use. They try to integrate school with experiences, interests and concerns of kids. Now, a lot of American parents are a little skeptical about "informal education" and when they would listen to someone speak about it, one of them usually would say,



"Didn't I hear about that, wasn't that the old progressive movement that failed in American education? And isn't that a permissive approach to education? And I would say, "But let's listen to someone from England." I always want to explain the difference between an American and an Englishman trying to explain informal education: I once saw someone from England convince a group of middle class parents that informal education was okay simply by virtue of his style and his accent. The people said, "Gee, didn't he say that beautifully"—and nothing bad could ever come from England because they didn't do bad things.

That brings me to a very important point: that the public the parents who want the very best for their kids, just as most teachers do, have to be informed. We've got to make information available to the people—that there are workable alternatives; that we have one way, but there are other ways and right now in any school we have at least two ways, and I think very quickly we could have three ways. Why should I have to spend $3,000 to send my child to a Montessori school? Why can't the public schools have it? The alternative within a school is based on a theory, it's based on a philosophy, it has teacher preparation programs; and a responsive, updated system of public education ought to have it. You could have multiculture schools, and later on you could have schools with walls and schools without walls. What we're interested in doing from various teaching styles, to schools within schools, to separate schools if necessary, is to open up new envir-

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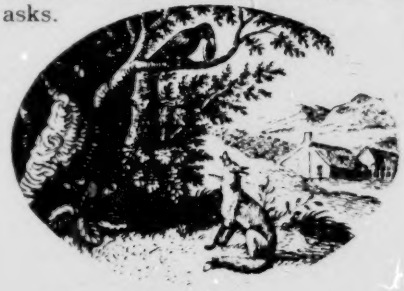
Albert Shanker: A One-time Teacher Speaks Out On Unions and Teachers' Rights

In New York City, where it is difficult to establish a consensus on anything, the mention of the name "Albert Shanker" can unify a lot of people in discomfort.

Shanker, the president of the United Federation of Teachers, has earned great notoreity since New York City's teacher strikes of 1967 and 1968; yet, he remains one of the most powerful forces in public education today. Perhaps he will be even more powerful in the near future if his urban-based UFT merges with the older and larger National Education Association (which he claims is likely within the next five years) thus forming a three million member union, one of the largest in the nation. What makes Shanker an imposing figure is his perception of the complex plays of urban politics, his doggedness in contract bargaining, and his understanding of the needs and sensitivities of his teachers—he was, after all, once a math teacher himself.

Nevertheless, as Shanker made clear in his talks with Yale University students and faculty late last year, he is also concerned with the teacher's role in educational reform: "you can't have change in education without bringing the teachers along." Teachers don't oppose or advocate change, Shanker contended, they just don't want to be hurt. At the same time, however, they are cynical toward change, and "with good reason": "most change is related to the political insecurities of the school board or administrators... and does not do any good for the kids."

To ask the blanket question, "What should be done to reform the schools?" is like asking "How can we cure cancer?" Shanker says. The only answer, he says, is the same as for any other field of research—"a painstaking approach of experimentation." And while the parents may want to become involved in school reform, they have no interest in evaluating teachers, according to Shanker; "they just want to be able to lodge complaints." Shanker is skeptical about the values for community control and decentralization, saying that his "gut reaction" to these issues is that they reflect bigotry and narrow-mindedness. If parents are so concerned with the issues of decentralization, why is it that only 9 per cent of them came out in New York to vote on them? he asks.



Although Shanker is tangentially involved with school reform, his profession is organizing teachers. Naturally, he disagrees that today's powerful unions are stultifying forces in society; he insists that they are not only good, "but absolutely essential if we're to maintain democracy." Unionization gives you political clout in a democracy dominated by politics, he says: it serves the integrity of your own institution and serves as the only force which can counterbalance huge sums of money.

All workers, claims Shanker, should have the right to strike, except in cases where such strikes would involve a danger to the lives and health of community members—society has a right to protect itself against these strikes, Shanker says (although viable alternatives should be provided to workers who are not allowed to strike). On the other hand, many workers are not committed to a strong labor movement because they see the movement as initially reducing productivity, according to Shanker. When these workers do strike, he says, you can imagine how filled with resentment they must be concerning the way they've been treated.

The alternative to calling strikes is establishing an effective collective bargaining procedure, maintains Shanker, a stubborn bargainer himself, who jokingly says: "I tell the Board of Education, 'You have to give me something very good because I'm a coward and I don't want to go before the teachers with something bad.'" Shanker admits that collective bargaining is "very messy, but any other form (of settlement) gives you some sort of dictatorship." Collective bargaining makes the employer and the worker equal in power; otherwise, the individual worker would be as effective as a "cripple against a prize fighter." Collective bargaining, then, is merely a fair fight, and "you've got to fight for a piece of the pie or else you won't get your share."

While unions may be essential in maintaining democracy, the unions themselves do not always represent grass roots democracy in action: you cannot have 74,000 New York teachers at the bargaining table with the Board of Education. But full participation at every level of democracy is not necessary, Shanker says, and less democratic processes on the surface sometimes produce more democratic results. The old political bosses, for example, often come up with back-room party candidates who are at least representative of the public's choice as those candidates selected at political conventions, according to Shanker. (Indeed, the McGovern campaign, he says, seems to have shown that conventions can come up with a candidate unpopular with the majority of the people.)

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School of Choice....

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onments that get at the same educational destinations.

Because the public schools are accountable to the public and have reponsibility to them, they have a responsibility to achieve certain objectives. (I am a little disconcerted about the private sectors because the same kind of accountability may not prevail there.) The public schools have a special relationship to prepare people and to help them in terms of performing roles in society, and unless you're an independently wealthy parent and send your child to a private school that says freedom works, it's possible that your child would be happy and joyous, but couldn't read and write or qualify for any kind of job.

We're at a point now where public schools have to be accountable for that, unless you're perpetuating fraud on the next generation. One of the things I'm concerned about with voucher plans is that people might set up fly-by-night institutions which last nine months to a year, promise all kinds of things and then go out of business and perpetuate a fraud on a consumer who thought they were getting the best thing. The public schools still remain the institution that has the best hope of providing the voucher system. Not with some fancy kind of reform, but significant reform that opens up alternatives and gives teachers a choice and gives parents and students a choice among these.

The common set of objectives—basic skills, survival skills, reading, writing, communications, learning to learn skills—are absolutely essential and you can't get by without these. Every alternative has to be able to say I'm going to be accountable for these: "I'll achieve them in my own way, but there is no way that I'm going to get around it." Of course, there are some people who say it is such a bore to deal with these basic skills that they'd rather not do it. I've seen teachers run away from it to free schools where they thought they didn't have to deal with this. To me that's perpetuating a fraud.

There ought to be diversification geared to the same common ends. It ought not cost more money. You may need some start up money to explore Montessori, but you have a lot of money in there for inservice education. It could be used differently; we could rearrange the resources we now have. I'm tired of add-ons—they're costly and they don't work. I'm not talking about additional schools for the elite. I'm not talking about vocational education, where you work with your hands and some place else where your work with your heads. I'm talking about mainstream. I'm talking about the ability to go to college. I'm talking about diversifying each child, regardless of his background. That's why I'm starting with myself, with my child, with the teacher you have now, with his style.

Some people ask me what happens if everybody opts for the informal alternative and nobody's left in the others. I have not seen that happen anywhere. If it does occur, I would not say, "Ah ha, teacher B, since nobody's in your class, get out." Not at all. What do we have inservice education for? People spend thousands of dollars going to teacher education institutions; you simply have to retool the person to the style that's most compatible. So I'm not talking about putting anybody out of work.

Every alternative must be subjected to evaluation to see how well it's doing. The important thing is the right of individual choice. What I learned from New York was that nobody could sit up there and make decisions for me; no representative group could represent me, not in something as important as education, which is important to survival, important to success.

So what I am suggesting now is that at this stage in our development, we ought to be able to encourage individual choices among teachers, parents and students. The professional groups need to assume major responsibility for supporting constructive reform through this initial diversification of public education together with the parents. With parents, students and teachers making individual choices, and with the school administrators as the climate setters and orchestrators of all this we have a good chance of creating a cooperative process rather than the politically ladden conflict-prone process of the present. Public schools of choice could be done now, because right now we are spending most of our time and energy trying to make the *one* standard program work for everybody, an effort that simply cannot work. We are overloading our standard model of education and disturbing the climate for those who would profit from it.

We need to mobilize our time and energy in the pursuit of optional learning environments. We have the resources and talent to start this process. In fact, the beginning of a "trend" toward alternative education is already in process throughout this country. Whether this trend will blossom into a full-scale reform movement will depend on our leadership. Otherwise, it may fizzle into a fad.

This model, which I call Public Schools of Choice, is a very conservative plan. It is a plan based on individual rights to choice. It ought not to cause any political problems because there is something for everybody here. Those who want the standard can have it. Those who want the informal can have it. Those who want to explore others, as long as they are legitimate, could meet certain criteria, they can have their option as well. All can work together on the implementation of this plan. Teachers, parents and students working together, that itself is a constructive notion. We can begin to avoid the collision which, I sense, is coming among the agents closest to the action—parents, teachers and students—a collision that can only be avoided if genuine reform of our public schools is achieved. ■

Needed: A Citizens Lobby in Education

At a time when public education needs more direction from the public than ever, there remains no mechanism for the public interest to be expressed in a systematic, meaningful, and productive way: so says Carl Marburger, the former commissioner of education for New Jersey.

Marburger maintains that in spite of more than a decade of vast, creative, and expensive research, the problems in education have not diminished substantially; the results, in fact, have produced more confusion, frustration, despair and a critical loss of confidence in the schools by the American people. The needed reforms cannot "take the form of patchwork, fragmented and ambiguously administered legislation that characterized the sixties," says Marburger. "Much more comprehensive and well-organized effort will have to be required...The issue is who controls education."

Thus, what is needed in Marburger's view is an organized public interest group in education—such as the National Committee for the Support of the Public Schools, of which Marburger is one of three associates. This organization is seeking members concerned with a common purpose: to study and advise on educational issues of national importance from the consumer's point of view. Those who would like more information or would like to enroll with the committee should write to: Carl Marburger / National Committee for the Support of the Public Schools / Suite 410 / Wilde Lake Village Green / Columbia, Maryland 21044.

A Third Force....

(continued from page 1)

providing leadership training, consultant help, information, and materials;

—activities to increase the understanding of and support by citizens, parents, and educators for citizen participation in decision-making, including conferences and publications.

The Institute recently has begun to develop a comprehensive national survey designed to determine the location, characteristics, and roles of outside-the-system groups working for school improvement and inside-the-system participatory mechanisms, such as school councils and neighborhood school boards.

Davies sees the IRE as one of a burgeoning number of efforts and enterprises with similar goals—to develop more effective, responsive educational institutions and to increase the average citizen's influence over the forces that affect his or her life.■

Shanker....

(continued from page 8)

And the so-called "democratic" procedures for electing local school board members in New York City are no more democratic than if the board members were appointed, Shanker says. With hundreds of candidates running for office, each receiving less publicity than the city dog catcher, how is the average citizen supposed to know who to elect? Shanker has no ready answers, but maintains that the present system is unworkable—although he admits that such a system is good for his union, since it helps an organized union push in the candidates of its choice.■

San Francisco....

(continued from page 2)

shared goals for their childrens' educations. In several cases, this association led to cooperative projects among organizations, new models for citizen participation in the public schools. One such case was the formation of a new *Service Center for Public Education.*

The idea of the Service Center arose through representatives from two community organizations, SPEAK (the Sunset-Parkside Education Action Committee) and the OMI Community Association, who agreed that most parent groups lacked the time and personnel to monitor effectively decisions of the board of education. The two groups also agreed that too often community organizations received information on key issues either to late or not at all. They felt that parents and citizens throughout San Francisco could benefit from a full-time staff to provide just that link to the day-to-day action of the San Francisco district. Thus, these two community organizations applied for and received a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation of San Francisco to establish this new office, fully independent of the local school district.

Today, the Service Center (which officially opened last September) consists of a small staff in a central downtown location and an advisory committee representing two major community organizations in the city. Since most citizens continually have been baffled by the mechanics and politics of the San Francisco District's annual budget process, the advisory committee's first priority was to make available a budget primer for parents and community groups entitled, "Access to the Schools: A Guide to the San Francisco School Budget."

Over time, the composition of the Center's Advisory Committee will change to a city-wide representation of various groups. The staff welcomes ideas and correspondence from community organizations in other cities. For more information, please write or phone: The San Francisco Service Center for Public Education / 1095 Market Street, Suite 818 / San Francisco, Ca. 94103 (Telephone: 415 / 626-8427).■

How to Change the Schools

By Ellen Lurie
293 pp. New York:
Vintage Books $2.95 (paperback)

In May, 1970, during the peak of a decade of demonstrations and social upheavals, Ellen Lurie put the finishing touches on a book that highlighted fifteen years of her struggle with the New York Public School System.

It was not to be an objective book: indeed, we can see that it is a very personal document, written from the point of view of a parent who has gone to so many meetings and testified at so many hearings, written hundreds of letters, made thousands of phone calls, demonstrated, negotiated, compromised, and bargained—and yet, still saw an educational system in which her children were "stifled, adjusted, manipulated, corrected—...not nurtured, enjoyed, or loved or genuinely educated."

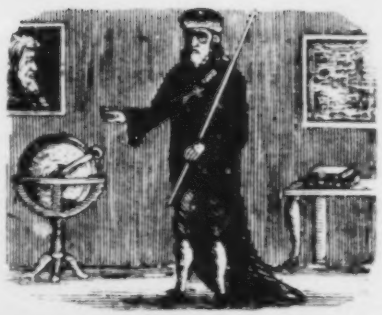
But it is not a bitter book, in spite of all her mistakes and disappointments; it is a book of perspective, self-reflection, criticism, and alternatives—not utopian solutions, but practical options, suggestions, and guidelines. Indeed, it is aptly described by its subtitle, "A Parents' Action Handbook on How to Fight the System." And although it was published three years ago, it remains as perhaps the best contemporary manual for parents interested in school reform.

When the first of Ms. Lurie's five children began public school in Washington Heights, New York, during the mid-1950's, she quit her job as a community worker in East Harlem and became active in the neighborhood elementary school parent association. "That community," she wrote, "had a wealth of articulate, dedicated and determined parents who were fighting for improved school service...We fought many hard fights, and we won a few." Then the battle over school integration engulfed them in years of anger, turbulence, feelings of powerlessness and frustration; for almost two of those years, the Luries sent their two oldest children fifty blocks to school in Harlem each day. The battle continued with the Board of Education, parents resigning from local boards, forming their own People's Board of Education, demonstrating and trying to keep the schools open during the teacher strikes of 1967 and 1968.

The strikes are over now, but the problems remain, not only in New York, but in struggling urban areas across the country. What has come from Ms. Lurie's experiences is several chapters laced with stories dealing with such aspects of education as curriculum; hiring, improving, and dismissing staff; reporting to parents; public hearings; and student and parents rights. Information is included on how the system functions (and what is wrong with the way it functions) along with substantial "action checklists" for parents at the end of each chapter. These checklists, which offer specific suggestions on how to cope with each of the topics, are one of the real strengths of the book: they indicate Ms. Lurie's resistance to the common social critic's temptation of writing nine large chapters describing a complex problem and one thin chapter attempting to deal with all the solutions.

One may quarrel with the suggestions or the various terms in the book ("demands," "rights," "grievances"), but it is clear that Ms. Lurie ultimately is not interested in politics, but in the best life for the nation's children, and in parents working together to achieve that goal: and it is this outlook that makes the book a bargain by anyone's standards ■

Ron Roel



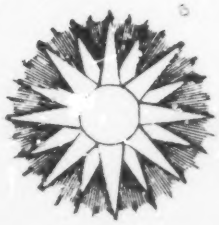
The staff of the Institute for Responsive Education has prepared a book entitled, *Citizen Participation in Education: Annotated Bibliography*, to be published in early 1974.

The annotations are not mere summaries; they are attempts to provide a substantive guide to the contents of each work, citing the author's major ideas, opinions and findings, and sometimes providing criticisms of the quality of the author's work, when such opinions seem warranted and helpful to the reader. (The bibliography includes 150 books and reports and 250 articles.)

The annotated references are arranged in nine sections: "Theoretical Background"; "Community Action"; "School Problems"; "School Politics"; "Community Control and Citizen Advisory Committees"; "Community Schools"; "Administration and Accountability"; "Guides for Citizens"; and a listing of particularly useful bibliographies. Section 10, "Dissertations," provides a listing without annotations of doctoral theses that are summarized in *Dissertation Abstracts International*.

The book initially was published as a Working Paper of the Center for the Study of Education of Yale University's Institution for Social and Policy Studies. It may be obtained for a price of $3.00 by writing the Institute for Responsive Education.

The Institute for Responsive Education publishes this newsletter for *you*—the citizen, the parent, the student—and for teachers and the administrators, as well. Not only do we want you to read these pages, we want you to use them as a forum for your ideas and as a wide exchange for information and ideas about citizen action in education. Since the *Institute* is a non-membership organization, we do not ask you for dues, only for your ideas and suggestions.



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